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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000406

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STATE FOR AMBASSADOR POWELL
STATE FOR EUR/OES CONNORS
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ETRD](#) [GR](#) [ECON](#) [AVIANFLU](#)

SUBJECT: H5N1 CONFIRMED IN GREEK BIRDS; UNCONFIRMED HUMAN
TRANSMISSION CASES.

REF: ATHENS 00386

1. (U) This is a Joint Athens-Thessaloniki Cable

2. (U) SUMMARY: On 11 February, the European Commission's laboratory in Weybridge U.K. confirmed the presence of H5N1 Avian Influenza in Greece after the three samples sent from migratory swans on 9 February tested positive for the virus (reftel). In addition, a fourth suspected H5N1 case has been reported on the island of Skyros, about 75 miles north east of Athens. Even more ominously, two Greek citizens have been hospitalized and isolated with flu like symptoms after coming into direct contact with sick and/or dead birds. The Greek Ministries of Agriculture, Interior and Rural Development are working with the EU, provincial and local authorities to confront the arrival of Avian Influenza in Greece. End Summary.

Sitrep/Actions taken by the GoG

3. (U) On 11 February, the European Commission's laboratory in Weybridge U.K., confirmed the presence of H5N1 Avian Influenza in Greece after the three samples sent from migratory swans on 9 February tested positive for the virus (reftel). In addition, a fourth suspected H5N1 case has been reported on the island of Skyros, about 75 miles north east of Athens. Greece also has two potential human cases of Avian Influenza: a 29-year-old hunter who handled a dead goose last week near the village of Kalahori (west of Thessaloniki), and a 19-year-old man who cared for an ill swan at his home outside of Thessaloniki. Both have been admitted to a hospital in Thessaloniki for flu-like symptoms and are in special isolation wings. H5N1 test results for the two men should be completed in 48 hours.

4. (U) The Ministry of Agriculture's strategy to utilize hunters, farmers, fisherman and citizens to be on the lookout for dead or dying migratory birds appears to have been effective in the early detection of Avian Influenza in northern Greece. In accordance with European Commission guidance, a 3 km protective radius, labeled as zone A, will be in place around the sites where the first three birds were found for 21 days; this area will be essentially isolated from free movement and will be closely monitored. An additional 10 km protective radius, labeled as zone B, extends further around the sites for an additional nine days and will be closely monitored. All domestic birds from within the zone will be banned from export outside the zone and the Ministry of Agriculture will continue to enforce its ban on open air poultry markets and farms. At this time, no mass culling of domestic birds has been ordered.

5. (U) The overall focus of the GoG at this time is to aggressively pursue early detection and isolation of H5N1 carrier birds and to prevent the virus from passing to domestic bird populations. Strict measures have been enforced to prevent open and un-contained exposure of domestic fowl and the GoG can levy fines of up to 3,000 euros for a violation of the containment protocols.

Public Outreach and Public Reaction

6. (U) The efforts of the GoG to inform the public on Avian Influenza have been received with mixed reaction among the public. Greeks in the rural areas have reacted more vocally and with greater concern than those in major urban centers. One bright note has been that the media so far has been remarkably cooperative in helping the government to keep the public informed on sanitation and personal protection measures leading Minister of Health Nikitas Kaklamanis to thank the media for its (uncharacteristically) calm and responsible tone.

Comment

17. (U) The upcoming spring season will bring a significant increase in migratory bird traffic in South-Eastern Europe as a whole. The recent confirmation of H5N1 in Southern Italy is indicative of this reality. Post expects the number of H5N1 cases in migratory birds to increase in the coming weeks and will continue to monitor the efforts of the GoG to isolate the domestic poultry industry from all possible contact with migratory birds. In the meantime, Post will continue to monitor additional developments and report as new information becomes available. Post EAC is also reviewing the Embassy's avian flu preparedness status. End Comment.
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